TIBETAN MURALS





CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS





CONTENTS

Preface	5
Guge Murals	18
Murals of Shalu Monastery	32
Drathang Monastery Murals	44
Murals of Jixiangduomen Tower in the Palkor Monastery	58
Potala Palace Murals	92
Murals of Other Monasteries	108



Preface

Tibetan murals are very rich in terms of color and content!

Murals are everywhere on the walls as well as corridors, zenith, beams, etc. of monasteries, palaces, mansions, houses, inns, hotels and other places. Monasteries have most murals. Large monasteries usually have dozens to hundreds of halls, and walls, ceilings, etc. of each hall and corridors around it are painted over murals. Monasteries in Tibet have countless murals, which form a beautiful and colorful gallery in Tibet. In the mural world, the content varies from gods to people, from landscape to architecture, from animals to monsters, from stories to reality, from history to today.... It can be said that this is a "Three Realms" painted on the wall, which includes people, ghosts, gods and their stories.

Development of Tibetan Mural

Mural, by definition, is painting drawn on a wall. According to legend, murals in Tibet originated from cliff carving. Historical records of Tibet said: In 629 or the year Tibetan King Songtsan Gambo succeeded to the throne, it was said that he saw Sakyamuni, Hayagriva, Tara and Acalavajra, he ordered a Nepalese craftsman immediately to carve and paint the four Buddha figures on rocks... which was said to be the first mural in Tibet.

Both carving and mural share the process of painting and coloring, but which is earlier is unknown. There are also studies indicating that mural is passed from outside Tibet.

Tibetan mural development is relatively clear. On the land of Tibet, mural traces of different historical periods are preserved, lasting from the Tubo Period to modern times. The first well documented murals in Tibet appeared in the Tubo Period. It is said that Songtsan Gambo's secret book recorded his personal arrangement of

murals on the subject of Tibetan Buddhist stories such as Hayagriva, Avalokitesvara, White Tara, and Suji Nima, story of parrot, story of monkey, story of bird painted by Tibetan, Chinese and Nepalese artists on the walls in the Jokhang Monastery. In the first half of 12th century, the Jokhang Monastery had experienced several large-scale fights, in which many houses were charred, but today, we may still see some of the mural remains of the year drawn on some of the north walls on the second floor faintly.

In 641, before Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) married Songtsan Gambo, Lhasa did not even have a decent palace or monastery, the Jokhang Monastery, Ramoche Monastery, and Potala Palace were built after the arrival of Princess Wencheng. Many craftsmen participating in the construction came from the Han region and Nepal, which enjoyed much higher painting level than Tibet, for example, many excellent murals had been found at Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes and so on earlier. The traces of Han and Nepal were seen in the first Tibetan murals. The murals of this period featuring well-rounded image, pure color, are very close to the works of Dunhuang murals in the Northern Wei (386–534) and Early Tang Dynasty (618–907); while, soft body line, graceful posture and high decoration are of the charm of Nepalese paintings.

Later, murals are an important part of monasteries in Tibet. As long as there is construction of a monastery, murals will be painted as decoration. It extends from single religious content to a wide range of real life and historical themes. Around the 14th century, with massive construction and expansion of monasteries, a large number of murals had been painted, leading to the formal founding of Tibetan national style mural school. At the end of

the 10th century, Buddhism revived in Ngari of Tibet and Amdo of Qinghai, which also brought the prosperity of mural art. Around the 14th century, with massive construction and expansion of monasteries, a large number of murals had been painted, leading to the formal founding of Tibetan national style mural school. As the rise of the Shamanism led by Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), large-scale development of Monasteries, the mural art of Tibet entered into the most brilliant period.

Category of Tibetan Murals

Experts divide Tibetan murals into the following major categories.

I. Buddha and Bodhisattva paintings. Iconic paintings of Buddha, Bodhisattva, Heavenly King, Tara, Apsara, tantric deity and Dharmapala. Painters give human nature through arts to Buddha statues, so that the Buddha and Bodhisattva show pious, handsome, charitable, charming, staunch and other demeanors.

II. Paintings for Jataka story. The continuous paintings not only present major events in the Buddha's life, but also promote some of the stories of Buddhist doctrine. There are Jataka paintings showing all kinds of stories of Sakyamuni's life history and previous life and biography of the Buddha; biographies of masters (Padmasambhava, Atisha), biographies of dharmarajas (Phags-pa, Milarepa, Tsongkhapa, 5th Dalai Lama), biographies of Tibetan kings (Songtsan Gambo, Trisong Detsen) and so on.

III. Biography paintings and portraits of Dalai Lama, Panchen Erdeni and eminent monks. There are statues of the Dalai Lama, Panchen Erdeni and other eminent monks and living Buddhas; statues of Songtsan Gambo, Trisong Detsen, Chire Bajin and other Tibetan kings; and statues of Princess Wencheng, Princess Jincheng, Princess Bhrikuti Devi and other imperial concubines. The kind of

works is exhibited in all the monasteries in Tibet like comic books. Each figure has distinctive personality, so anyone knowing the Tibetan culture can tell the difference.

IV. Major historical events and folk paintings. For example, Potala Palace murals record the scenes that Songtsan Gambo married Princess Wencheng, and Princess Wencheng was warmly welcomed by all the Tibetans of Lhasa. There are a lot of contest, horse racing, boxing, wrestling and weightlifting scenes in the murals of the Samye Monastery by the Yarlung Zangbo River, as well as excellent performance of a *Qigong* master with two blades supporting the abdomen, and hands and feet stretching straight, which reflects one aspect of Chinese traditional acrobatics.

V. Architectural paintings. Many spectacular buildings are often painted in murals, such as the Jokhang Monastery, Potala Palace, Samye Monastery, Tashilhungpo Monastery, Sakya Monastery, Shanxi Mount Wutai, and so on. These murals depict not only architectural splendor and beauty, but also construction process, and for example, there are hundreds of paintings showing the construction process of the Potala Palace.

Tibetan murals combine the social landscape, religious development, history, legends and customs in Tibet. It does not stick to religious content, many paintings truly reflect history, people's life and nature; record beautiful myths and legends and folk tales; and show the major events and important figures in Tibetan history. Even the pictures of religious subjects, to varying degrees, reveal the social contradictions and people's living conditions. Tibetan mural is actually a scroll of Tibetan history record.

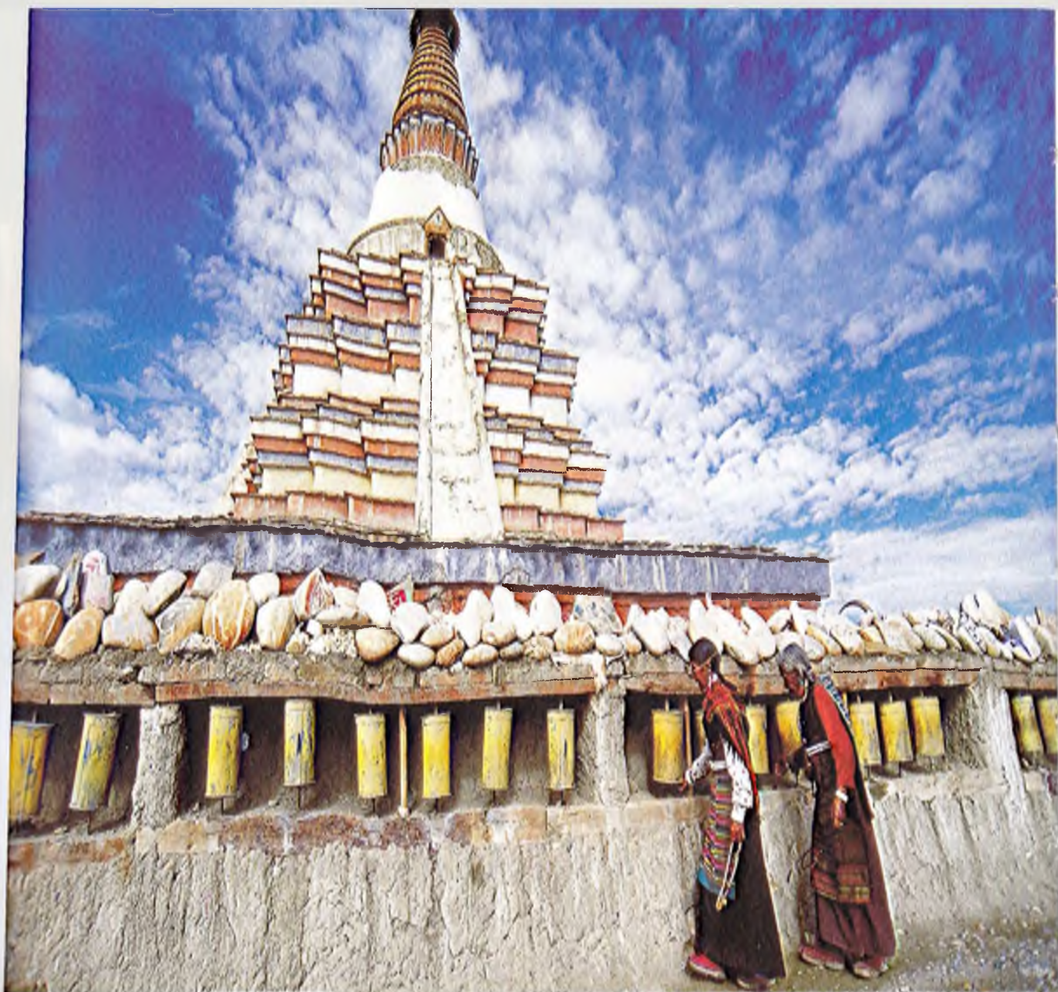
Painting Schools

Since the Jokhang Monastery was built in the Songtsan Gambo period, Chinese and Nepalese

painting schools mainly led Tibetan mural. Many years later, in its development, Tibetan mural continued to absorb a wide range of nutrition and impact and fuse the Tibetan tradition and outside influences, forming its schools of art with distinctive Tibetan characteristics.

In the 13th century, Tibetan mural in the development formed several schools of different styles: "Mointang", "Kanri", and "Kangzi".

Mointang, namely "Wenzi" school, was established by Tibetan mural founder, Mointang Jiangyangdunzhu. He blended the characteristics of murals of excellent Tibetan artists, and formed a school with strong national characteristics and unique performance practices. It is characterized by bright colors, sharp contrast, detailed depiction and magnificence, and is Tibet's most influential school of painting. Murals in the three Tibetan monasteries - Zhaibung Monastery, Sera Monastery and Ganden Monastery, are the representative works of Mointang. Kanri, also called "Zangzi" school, influenced greatly by Nepal and India in early stage, is popular in Gyantse and Xigaze. It features full composition, mighty and deep colors, well-rounded figure and pursuit of curve changes. Gyantse Palkor Monastery and Xigaze Tashilhungpo Monastery, Sakya Monastery, and Ngari Tholing Monastery are of this school. But Tashilhungpo Monastery and Sakya Monastery, both belonging to the school, differ slightly in drawing styles due to different years. Tholing Monastery, due to addition of more elements outside, compared with other Monastery murals, has a style of its own. Palkor Monastery is a monastery integrating three schools of Sakya, Kadam (predecessor of Gelug) and Gelug, and three artistic styles of Tibet, Nepal and China, with unique style of mural art, which found its best expression in the murals of the Palkor Tower. Backlight is an important feature of the Palkor



Tholing Monastery Tholing Tower

The Tholing Monastery, built in 996, means the monastery hovering in the air. It, located in the northwest of Zada county town, is the oldest Buddhist Monastery in Ngari. It has played an important role in the whole Tibetan Buddhism history. Tholing Monastery's prosperous period continued from its foundation to about the twelfth century, the Buddhist artworks of this period excavated indicate the reproduction and interaction of a variety of extra-territorial Buddhist art styles, and are still important clues and bases for studies on the source and development of early Buddhist art of Tibet. Tholing Monastery had three main halls and nearly ten small halls, and dormitories, scripture halls, stupas and other buildings, but now only the three main halls and Tholing Tower are well preserved with exquisite murals.

Monastery mural decorations, composed of head light and body light. The common backlights are boat-shaped, niche-shaped, oval, and horseshoe-shaped types, characterized by fine shape, rich pattern, excellent symmetry, sharp but harmonious color contrast, rich color, and solemn but not dull feeling.

"Kangzi" school, also known as Karma Gazhe, is mainly prevalent in Xikang, meaning Chinese painting school. As the name suggests, it is mainly influenced by Chinese paintings. It is characterized by fine expression of characters, good use of flowers and trees, water and rocks and so on as the contrast, harmonious combination of colors. Murals of the school were mainly painted in the Qamdo Jampaling Monastery and Riwoqe Monastery.

In the Tibetan Buddhist mural art, Ngari Guge murals, different from other Tibetan murals, form a unique school of art, and show multi-cultural characteristics. They provide extremely important materials for us to understand and study the religious and cultural relations of ancient Ngari with neighboring Kashmir, the Western Regions, Nepal, India and other countries and regions. The wealth of cultural information in Guge murals proves that Guge art is the multi-ethnic integration and innovation of Buddhist culture and art outside.

There is another unique classic, murals of the Potala Palace. When the 5th Dalai Lama rebuilt the Potala Palace, to draw murals, in addition to convening Monastery artists, he assembled more than 60 artists in the Tibet, and hired a group of artists from Nepal, and the Emperor Kangxi also sent more than 100 Chinese artists to Tibet. As the artists of all ethnic groups came together, the climax of mural art appeared, which had a positive impact on later ages. The significant results are: more extensive mural themes, secular themes

appearing in mural art, diverse styles and genres, era of famous painters, mural art gradually formed a unique national style, and murals fitted in with society, and were increasingly becoming a part of social culture.

Drawing Process of Murals

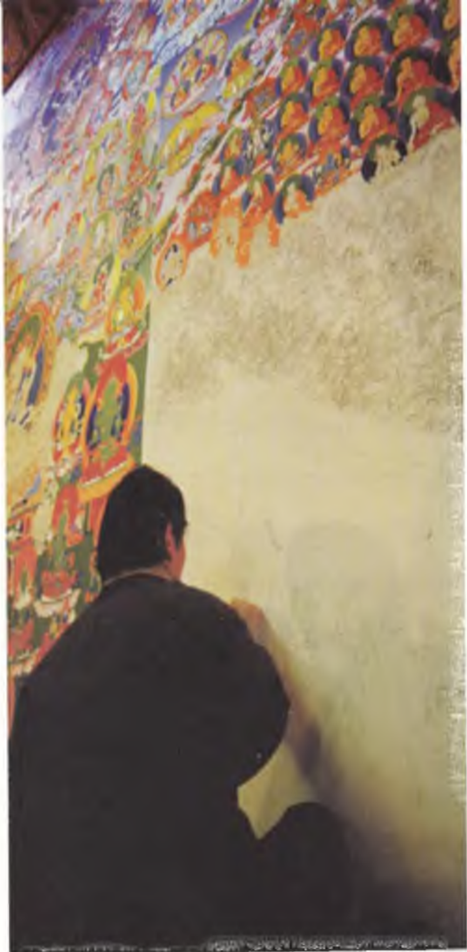
The drawing preparation can be divided into the following steps: The first step is based on wall length and width to determine the location of painting and draw borders; the second step is to mix the boiled thin leather glue with little red paint, and brush a layer of pink glue on the walls; the third step is to blend yellow pigment called "Saangba" with a slurry made of glue, and paint it on the walls; the third step is to polish the walls to form a base plane; the fourth step is to draw three colors of blue, red and green from the top from the one-sixth place on the plane, the blue is used to write down Tibetan or Sanskrit scripture or Bodhisattva's names, the red and green are processed to curtains, and painted with decorative patterns or jewelry designs. The fifth step, the blank from bottom frame to the ground is called "Gacai", with a height of about one-third of the wall, can be decorated in dark blue or dark green, but mostly white.

Before the start of drawing, first draw diagonal lines to find the center, and determine the location of characters and scenes. The "paper" is processed, and then you can paint the walls. Concrete steps are as follows:

The first step is called "Rubure" in Tibetan, referring to the processes including sketching main characters with charcoal pencil, minor characters, landscaping, animals, flowers and trees.... Characters shall be painted in strict accordance with the proportion of *Sutra of Statue Measurements*, most of which are completed by seasoned painters.

Paint murals

An artist is painting murals for a new Monastery in Qamdo Prefecture.



The second step is called "Jie" or drawing graphite lines according to the lines drawn with charcoal pencil.

The third step is called "Cun" or applying colors. Pigments are traditional opaque mineral pigments, mixed with gelatin and bovine bile, to keep paintings colorful and durable. Coloring in the order is: heaven, earth, clouds, head light and backlight of main Buddha, clothes and dark part of other scenes, human flesh and other light-colored parts.

The fourth step is called "Dang", which means further processing and rendering of color clumps. Such as, intersperse, rub and mottle heaven, earth, light, petals, etc. and draw muscle, bone structure and shading on the revealed parts of the body by mottling.

The fifth step is called "Jie", and this time, the artists work to outline contour and drapery with colored lines. After "Cun" and "Dang" steps, the original contours and drapery drawn with graphite lines are covered by colors, so the original graphite lines need to be redrawn with a dark pigment.

The sixth step is called "Saire", that is, gold application. The use of gold and silver powder is an indispensable part of Tibetan mural. The application includes the head wear, keyura, drapery, clothing patterns of Buddha statues, backlight, music instruments, construction top,

rocks, etc. The more important halls and murals are, the more gold and silver are applied. Some murals have to use three-dimensional gold lines, and the method is to load plaster paste mixed with glue into a bladder with a small mouth, extrude plaster paste along the graphite lines to form three-dimensional relief-like lines, and apply gold or silver powder after being dried.

The seventh step is called "Jianqi". This is an important step in the mural drawing, whether the characters are vivid depends on facial expression.

The eighth step is called "Saijue", which means to polish the gold and silver part with a special amber pen, so that the entire painting process is complete.

Finally, the finishing work is to apply some plastic juice or varnish. General inscription includes reason and content of murals, as well as names of each person and god. Unlike Thangka paintings and statues for adherents and pilgrims to pay homage to, murals are used to introduce the history, clear teachings, record eminent monks, kings, courtiers and concubines, and have relatively extensive free content, and characters can be added or deleted by artists sometimes.

Most murals in Tibetan monasteries are based on ***Sutra of Statue Measurements*** and three other sutras as the painting specification, for the purpose of religious propaganda, which require the scale of Buddha statues, musical instruments, accessories, and so on. The Buddha, Guanyin, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Ksitigarbha, and other characters in the Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism bear some characteristics of Tibetan Buddhist art. However, the Tibetan artisans are not restrained by the Buddhist rituals during mural creation, and on the contrary, sometimes get rid of that uniform, rigid requirements. In addition to some identifying features in accordance with specification, they will penetrate their own observation on the real image

of people, their thoughts and feelings and artistic personality into the works, so that some Buddha statues have local features and human interest, and the vividly depicted scenery, landscape and secular scenes of life, are endowed with strong sense of reality and people's nature.

Tibetan Mural Crisis

Tibet has more than a thousand Monasteries, each Monastery has beautiful murals, however, these paintings are "ill", and some are very "ill", due to lack of effective protection for a long time.

After the survey in Lhasa, Xigaze, Shannan, Ngari and other prefectures, Dunhuang Academy experts found out that the Tibetan mural problems are mainly hollowing, cracking, dislocation, etc. caused by leakage of rain and wall damage. Hollowing is the most popular and affected damage to Tibetan Monastery murals, accounting for more than 75 percent of the total area of the murals. As the production materials and processes of Tibetan murals and walls are different from those of Chinese Monasteries, shrines and caves, protection and restoration of the hollowing murals are still a gap at home and abroad.

Almost all the walls of halls and cloisters in the famous monasteries in Tibetan history, such as the Lhasa Jokhang Monastery, Ngari Tholing Monastery and Ruins of Guge, Shannan Samye Monastery, etc., have been painted with murals. They, featuring broad themes, rich content and fine skills, can be said as the huge museum of Tibetan mural. Later, because of the destruction of Buddhism by Tibetan king Langdarma or the Cultural Revolution, fire and other reasons, the original murals in early stage were badly damaged, only a few remained down, and are precious in the entire Tibetan, which are rare historical materials for understanding and study of Tibetan traditional athletic competitions.



Damaged murals

Because of leaks, damaged walls and other reasons, damaged murals can be seen everywhere in Tibet.

For a long time, the ancient mural paintings on the walls, because of smoke, flooding, peeling, vandalism and other reasons, had suffered different degrees of damage. Since the 1980s, China began to put a lot of money in the Tibetan culture and art protection including the murals.

In a chronological order, several representative Tibetan monasteries (Guge Kingdom, Shalu Monastery, Drathang Monastery, Palkor Monastery, and Potala Palace) are arranged in the book, in which the Potala Palace is special. In accordance with the year of construction, Potala Palace was built in the 7th century, its first mural was also earlier than other Monasteries, but due to its small scale, very few murals then were left. The real massive expansion was from the 15th–17th centuries, the murals drawn then also represent the peak of the Tibetan painting art, and most murals involved in the book are also works of this period, so I put it behind the Palkor Monastery. The last chapter is left for *Murals of Other Monasteries*, which includes representative murals of other monasteries in Tibet, and gives brief introduction to the basic information of these Monasteries in the illustration, to give readers a comprehensive view of the Tibetan mural.



GUGE MURALS

Guge murals are mainly found in Zada County, Ngari, represented by several caves as Tholing Monastery, Guge Ruins and Donggapiyang. Guge as the center of Zhangzhong civilization had formed its own cultural style as early as before the establishment of the Tubo Kingdom. Its artistic development is divided into two stages: the early stage of 11th–13th centuries, the middle stage of late 14th century to early 17th century.

Guge Art, learning widely in the early stage, was clearly influenced by Buddhist art in Kashmir, and also under a certain degree of penetration of Indian and Nepalese artistic styles. "Guge School" was formed in 1300–1630, during this period, the early artistic style affected by neighboring countries integrated harmoniously into the "Guge Style". After the 16th century, Guge School made an outstanding success in Tibetan art history. In late 17th century, the Guge Kingdom disappeared, leaving only a few residual palaces and caves, but a large number of extraordinary paintings left by artists had a far-reaching impact on Tibetan art, and attracted unlimited imagination of later generations for the ancient mysterious kingdom.

Paintings of Guge School feature heavy coloring, combination of flat color and rendering, vivid and smooth lines, steady and changeful layout, and highly decorative pattern. Guge mural subjects are very rich, and besides Buddhist theme, there are a lot of real-life works. Another feature of Guge mural is to appreciate human body as

an art, and portray women as Apsaras, leaving a lot of wonderful human portraits. In addition, ceiling mural is a prominent art form in Guge period, with colorful content and form, grand overall design, and obvious regional style.

These paintings, with rich content, unique style, and perfect art form, occupy a prominent position in the Tibetan painting art, and reflect the general style of Tibetan art after division of the Tubo Kingdom.

"Guge Tibetan Buddhist mural art, in the nearly one thousand years of development, has inherited the ancient Zhangzhong civilization and Tibetan Buddhist culture, blended the culture of Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia, the essence of U-Tsang Dorkam, and created a precedent for the culture of Later Buddhist Macro Period. Highly aesthetic art form, large-scale system, content-filled performance, brilliant and strong color rendering, finely sketched lines, highly decorative but varied composition, graceful and dynamic design, and profound description of folk customs, make it a rare flower with unique ethnic charm and regional characteristics in the Later Buddhist Macro Period, thus creating a new field in the Later Macro Period of Tibetan Buddhism. The art features and open characters of Guge murals represent another cultural height in the Later Macro Period of Tibetan Buddhist Art." These are the praises from experts which Guge mural completely deserves!



Guge Kingdom Ruins

Guge Kingdom ruins, located on the south bank of Sutlej River in the northwest of Tholing Town, Zhaburang, Zada County, Ngari, were established in the first half of 10th century, and lasted for 700 years. The royal castle continued its expansion from 10th to 16th centuries. It occupies an area of about 180,000 square meters, with a height of 300 meters from foothill to summit. More than 600 houses, stupas and caves on the whole mountain, form a huge ancient architectural complex. There are 5 well preserved monasteries and halls, together with clay Buddha statues and colorful murals left in the monastery. The site is valuable to study the history of Tibet and Tibetan architectural history and painting history since the 10th century.



Snake Woman

Murals of the Tholing Monastery. Snake woman, also known as "Lu" or "Lu Woman", is a kind of half-human, half-snake fairy. Snake woman, often seen in the Tholing Monastery murals, is depicted as plump and graceful woman. According to legend snake woman as the leader of all animals habitats in the water, stove, and between old trees. In the painting, the tail is like blooming flower, and snake woman's blue green body silhouetted against the red background, is extremely glamorous.



Queen of Guge Kingdom

Guge murals. Wasp waist and low shoulder, bare breasts and abdomen, longuette with fine pattern, lovely and cute facial expression, and unique charm. Another feature of Guge murals is to appreciate human body as an art, and portray women as Apsaras.



Worshiping the Buddha (local)

Guge mural. About 5 meters long and 1 meter high. Amitayus is sitting in the center on lotus throne, with monks and laymen lining up on both sides, totaling 73 characters. The mural, with bright red as the main color, and dynamic modeling of strong decorative effect, is a classic of the Guge murals. The characters portrayed are sitting or standing in different air. The beautiful and elegant women dressed in robe with a braided bun in a simple lifestyle, is a precious documentary painting of Guge period.



Discourse

Guge mural. As for uspicious birds and spirit beasts in the mural such as elephant, lion, peacock, Capricorn fish, skyhorse and dragon, it adopts exaggerated, distorted and anthropomorphic approach, sometimes also combines two kinds of animals, such as dragon and Capricorn fish, dragon and skyhorse, lion and bird, etc. In Ngari Guge grotto murals and ceiling murals, decorative combination of these animals is more colorful.





Biography of the Buddha (local)

Guge mural. The biography of the Buddha mainly promotes the story of Sakyamuni, and depicts the whole life of Sakyamuni from birth to renunciation. This picture shows the "Biography of the Buddha" on the third tier of the Guge red hall murals. Guge murals, different from the cellular layout of other Monastery murals, feature scroll form layout and content of secular and realist style. The composition depends on performance of special content and aesthetic needs, and the wall is divided into three to six tiers from top to bottom, surrounding the hall clockwise in stripes.



White Tara

Guge mural. According to legend, White Tara is the tears from the left eye of Arya Avalokiteshvara. In Tibetan Buddhism, Guanyin has a lot of incarnations, and Tara is the merciful Yidam of his incarnation. There are twenty-one Taras in different colors, in which the most respected and common in Monasteries is White Tara. The calm, dignified and beautiful painting of White Tara can be called a representative work of the Guge red hall murals. Round backlight and head light, ample bosom and slender waist, decorated shading pattern in backlight of clothing, waving streamers, and contrast of red and dark green. Lotus throne changes to pure white and peony petals, together with curly grass and vines. There are six Capricorn fish on the throne, decorated with animals and fairies in the middle.

Ushnisha Vijaya

Guge mural. Ushnisha Vijaya is a female merciful Bodhisattva. She has nine embodiments, and the most common embodiment has three faces and eight arms. Guge mural features warm-based rich and gorgeous colors, and unique sharp contrast. The female deities in the mural are particularly charming, with big breasts, wide hips, and slim waist, showing an S figure, revealing dance-like rhythms and dynamic beauty. It has very high artistic qualities.





Stupas

Guge mural. Stupa is also known as tope. Stupas were first used for offering and placement of sarira, scripture and a variety of properties, and later evolved into symbols of Buddhism. The stupas in the painting are similar in general shape, but different in detail and decoration, and the colorful patterns show extraordinary creativity of artists.



Devil under the Step of Vajra

Guge mural. Devil under the step of Vajra in Tibetan Buddhism means all evils, Vajra and other Dharmapalas protect Buddhist doctrine and believers. They have the power to frighten demons, which is expressed by stepping the devil. The devil appears in human shape, revealing grief and crying in the evil vividly.



MURALS OF SHALU MONASTERY

The Shalu Monastery, located in Shalu Village, Jiacuoxiong Township, Xigaze, was built by local dignitary Xirao Jiongnai in the early 11th century, and got scale in the 14th century after construction of several generations of the family.

Ancient murals of the Shalu Monastery mainly went through two important historical periods. The first period is in the 11th century when Shalu Monastery was built. The murals were distributed in the Dharmapala, Hayagriva, Prajnaparamita and other main halls built by Jiezun Xirao Jiongnai, where the Dharmapala Hall retained most of murals of this period. The second period is from the 13th century to the 14th century, namely the expansion period of Guxiang Zhabajianzan. Most of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) murals existing in Shalu Monastery were completed during this period.

Like other monasteries in Tibet, the Shalu Monastery murals can be divided into six categories: statues of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Dharmapalas and ancient founders, biography of the Buddha, mandala, and decorative patterns. Among them, the most unique is the huge mural of Jataka story. The murals of Esoteric Buddhism mainly involve the mandala and Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Vidya-rajas and Dharmapalas and so on within. These mandala murals are painted in strict accordance with the requirements of "Shiwan Tancheng Zunxiang Yigui" by the founder of Shalu Branch of Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism, Master Budun. Among them, the Manjusrimandala mural in the east Wuliang Palace was painted by Master Budun by hand, which is very precious.



A shot of the Shalu Monastery

The Shalu Monastery mural art style, under the impace of India, Nepal and China, formed a unique aesthetic style. Existing murals embody the development and general situation of mural art in Tibetan monasteries after the 11th century. Specifically, the influence from the Buddhist art of Nepal and India is mainly reflected in the composition of murals, character modeling, and rituals of traditional Buddha and Bodhisattva statues.

The largest number of extant ancient murals of the Shalu Monastery were painted by many outstanding Tibetan artists invited by Guxiang Zhabajianzan and his son in the 14th century. They are composed of all the murals in the assembly hall, Kanjur Hall, circumanbulation of Prajnaparamita Hall, circumanbulation on the first floor, and Gajia Wall Hall. There are a large number of Chinese painting elements. The clothing and accessories, landscaping, dragon and phoenix, as well as some details are strong reflection of Chinese painting style.

During this period, the painting techniques and artistic style of the Shalu Monastery murals were very mature. The mature superb art style by highly skilled artists affected the development of Tibetan mural art directly. The famous Jonang Monastery and Palkor Monastery had been under its far-reaching impact. The Shalu Monastery murals served as a link between the two generations of Tibetan mural art in the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1271–1644), is a milestone in the history of Tibetan Buddhist art in Yuan and Ming, and of great value to study the Tibetan Buddhist art, and Buddhist cultural exchanges with China, Nepal, India, etc.



Aksobhya

Shalu Monastery mural. Aksobhya is the eastern Buddha of the Five Dhyani Buddhas. Artists use superb skills to describe sense of the body, and give sense of reality to the Buddha portraits in a quiet and mysterious atmosphere, so that viewers will ignore the existence of lines. Akshobhya Buddha-field is the second Buddha-field, named Joy Pure Land, and its Tibetan name means true happiness. (Photo by Xiong Wenbin)

Ratnasambhava



Shalu Monastery mural. Ratnasambhava, translation of Sanskrit Ratnaketu, is one of the Five Dhyani Buddhas worshiped by Esoteric Buddhism, living south, hence is known as the southern Buddha of the Five Dhyani Buddhas. It is in the mural of Five Dhyani Buddhas on the south wall in the Kanjur Hall, with a frame two meters high. Five Buddhas in different body-colors in the painting, smiling, bear different mudra. The superb painting skills are amazing. Ratnasambhava is golden (yellow) principal tantra. (Photo by Xiong Wenbin)



Vairocana Buddha

Shalu Monastery mural. Vairocana, to enlighten beings, converts its own five wisdoms to five Buddhas: Vairocana in the center represents wisdom of all-encompassing space; Aksobhya in the east represents mirrorlike wisdom; Ratnasambhava in the south represents equalizing wisdom; Amitabha in the west represents wisdom of discernment; and Amoghasiddhi in the north represents all-accomplishing wisdom. Vairocana is the supreme Yidam, the highest Buddha of Esoteric Buddhism, and the highest god enshrined by Esoteric Buddhism. All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of Esoteric Buddhism come from Vairocana, and Vairocana in the central, commanding all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, is the fundamental Buddha of Esoteric Buddhism. The Five Dhyani Buddhas were drawn in colorful natural mineral pigments, with staggering red, yellow, blue, green, white and other colors. red and blue as the background compose the basic colors, and complex and gorgeous curly grass pattern is outlined in backlight. (Photo by Xiong Wenbin)



Gandharva

Shalu Monastery mural. Gandharva is a Buddhist god of incense and music. In the mural Gandharvas also refers to musicians in the palace. Gandharvas in the mural, smiling in flowers, dancing or plucking string instruments in their hands, generate both serious and friendly decorative effect in the picture.



Bodhisattvas (left)

Shalu Monastery mural. Bodhisattva is originally the title of Sakyamuni during his practice before entering into Buddhahood, and later used for pursuers of the ethics of Mahayana.



Bodhisattvas (right)

Shalu Monastery mural. Bodhisattvas around the main deity, appearing as beautiful women, wearing a crown and decorative beads, are listening to and smiling at the deity. Rich colors, smooth lines and decorative sense of beads are the features of the picture.



Statues of Sakyamuni and Vidya-raja

Shalu Monastery mural. The mural is located in the west of north wall of Kanjur Hall. The Kanjur Hall is a Buddha hall built in the early expansion of the Shalu Monastery in the 14th century, and murals in the hall were completed by at least three artists. The artists used superb skills to endow the deities on the walls worshiped with realism. Description on the collective sense of characters make viewers ignore existence of lines and capture their imagination in a quiet and mysterious atmosphere.



Jataka Story (local)

Shalu Monastery mural. Jataka story is mainly to promote the various good deeds of Sakyamuni in his previous life or a number of previous lives. Most stories, dramatic and healthy, teach people life skills, satirize rulers, promote patience and sacrifice, and most importantly, promote Buddhist teachings such as equality, and all beings may achieve Buddhahood. Paintings are pictures of these scenes.



DRATHANG MONASTERY MURALS

The Drathang Monastery was built in the late 11th century under the aegis of 70-year-old Gexi Zhabaenxie, who died at 79 years old, the main body was basically completed, and the left part was fully completed three years later. Unfortunately, the original large-scale architectural complex built in accordance with the Esoteric Buddhism Mandala, now only left the main hall and incomplete walls.

The Drathang Monastery mural, belonging to the early art type of Tibetan monasteries, is mainly based on statues, sculptures, supplemented by murals, and the content of murals is set in line with the Buddha statues enshrined inside monasteries. Configuration of this art was prevalent before the 14th century.

The walls of halls in the Drathang Monastery, remove statue backlight, all walls are painted with murals, in which the murals on the south, north, and west walls share the uniform content, and are the works created during the construction of the monastery. Murals on the east wall, different from the murals on the other walls in style and content, were apparently painted later.

The most prominent feature of character figures in the Drathang Monastery murals is rich and varied, indicating different heritage of artistic styles, reflecting U-Tsang is a fusion of artistic styles, and also proving the creativity and flexibility of artistic expression

then. The Drathang Monastery murals are mainly composed of the characters of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, monks and providers (referring to the pious believers that promote teachings by providing funds, goods or labor, making icons, digging caves, building places of worship and in other forms.), these four are complementary and different, and on the whole, they integrate into excellent pictures harmoniously. Among them, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas enjoy more art characteristics of East India and South Asia in shape, and monks, disciples and providers tend toward the pattern of East Asian art. As for facial features, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are Brahmanic, and monks and providers are oriental.

Light patterns in the Drathang Monastery murals are very rich, and people can see the change from the early style to ornate, complex and decorative direction. In addition, the characteristics of Buddha's lotus throne and Bodhisattva's crown patterns, reflect the transitional artistic features of Drathang Monastery, and indicate the style conversion of Tibetan art from ancient style to new medieval style.

The Drathang Monastery mural art includes Indian, Chinese, the Western Regions and Tibetan styles, the Tibetan artists, of obvious and prominent creativity, show their unique comprehensive ability by creating these murals.



Drathang Monastery

The Drathang Monastery, located in Zhanang County, Shannan, Tibet, is one of Tibet's earlier buildings. Its murals of unique style, in addition to the remains in the Shalu Monastery in the same period, have not yet been discovered in other regions. These precious historical relics have important reference value in the study of early Tibetan murals, external influences, clothing and accessories, etc.



■ <48>



Sakyamuni and His Disciples

Drathang Monastery mural. The painting reflects the characteristics of Drathang Monastery murals in composition. The main deity in the center, with only exposed heads of his disciples one behind another, is the feature of Tubo Period. The backlight in the painting is the most simple type of light in the Buddhist hall murals of Drathang Monastery, only with simple halos, a few ribbons outlining the edges of halos, and flat colors of only red, green and yellow for the middle part. This simple style is a early one, with a relatively strong artistic characteristics of Tubo Period. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Monks

Drathang Monastery mural. Monks in the painting have mostly round or square faces, bald or crew cut, bearded, and light and dark mottling for facial features. Their facial expressions, varying from person to person, with little conceptual processing, filled with life, are realistic and plain.



Bodhisattva

Drathang Monastery mural. Faces of the characters in the mural have clear and dark mottling processing, which makes character figures vivid and clear. People often believe the painting method was from India or Central Asia, and transformed into another kind of new style in Tibet, but it is not Brahmanic, and likely from the Western Regions.

Bodhisattvas

Drathang Monastery mural. Buddhism refers to the beings with certain practice inferior to Buddha as Bodhisattva. Faces of most Bodhisattvas in the Drathang Monastery following Brahmanic style, are added with a certain amount of Tibetan transformation. They have curved eyebrows and long eyes, smiling, wearing crowns and big earrings, their faces have light and shade processing, and they pose with hands or put hands together. Most clothes are silk gown of softness and excellent drape, with big lapels, a variety of floral patterns embroidered on collars, and huge floral decoration often appeared on gowns, which was the popular style for nobility in the period of the Tubo Kingdom.





Bodhisattva

Drathang Monastery mural. These wearing crowns are mainly the Bodhisattvas around Sakyamuni, the crowns of which can be divided into three-flower and five-flower crowns, wearing "high barrel" type of hair behind crown, high bun, or official hat.



Providers

Drathang Monastery mural. Provider refers to pious believer that promotes teachings by providing funds, goods or labor, making icons, digging caves, building places of worship and in other forms. High status of several providers in Tang clothing in the Drathang Monastery mural, can be seen from their gorgeous clothes. A woman in the painting is dressed similar to Chinese clothes. The three-leaf crown wearing is apparently different from the crowns on Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva

Drathang Monastery mural. The "flower" on Bodhisattva crowns of Tibetan Buddhist paintings is important to determine the age. The mixing of three-flower and five-flower patterns in Drathang Monastery murals is a feature of transition from Tubo Period to Later Macro Period, indicating the period of the Drathang Monastery murals should be an important period from ancient style to medieval new style in the Tibetan art history.





Drathang Monastery mural. Bangasayusang, is naturally compassionate Maitreya, in half-sitting posture of meditation on the rock, to listen to the sound of beings and to contemplate universal salvation. The two Bangasayusangs sit in front of Sakyamuni statue on both sides. The most prominent feature of the two Bodhisattvas is the processing mode by artists, very different from the majority of Bodhisattvas in Drathang Monastery murals. They not only are the exposed among many characters, but also enjoy typical Brahmanic faces, clothing and accessories, while most of the Bodhisattva faces are Brahmanic, and clothing and accessories are of style of Central Asia or Tibet. They are also a rare new Bodhisattva style in U-Tsang in the 11th century, and classics of Brahmanic style in the Tibetan painting history.



Murals of Jixiangduomen Tower in the Palkor Monastery

The Palkor Monastery, founded in the early 15th century, located at the foot of Mt. Dzong in the northwest of Gyantse Town, Gyantse County, is a typical Tibetan Buddhist building integrating stupa and monastery. The main body is composed of Palkor Hall, Jixiangduomen Tower and dratsang, forming a large architectural complex in the walls.

The Palkor Monastery murals, featuring rich content and wide range of topics, include Exoteric Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism, biography of Buddha story, and Jataka story. Murals in Jixiangduomen Tower focus more on the subject of Esoteric Buddhism and teachings heritage. According to the statistics from *Story of Gyantse Prince Dharma*, from the base to the block, 27,529 Buddha and Bodhisattva statues were painted in Jixiangduomen Tower. In the nearly 30,000 pieces of works, there are detailed inscriptions, but most are records of hall names, mural contents, artist and provider names, so it is difficult to research the exact year of creation of each one. According to the time of foundation and opening ceremony recorded in historical documents, these murals should be completed between 1418–1436, which is the prosperity of Tibetan Buddhist art. Representative works of Tibetan art such as murals of Guge,



Palkor Monastery Jixiangduomen Tower

Sakya Monastery, and Shalu Monastery have more or less impact on Palkor Monastery murals. The large-scale palace Tibetan Buddhist art during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) is the core for us to study the formation of its style. Meanwhile, Buddhist art of neighboring countries Nepal and India left marks on Palkor Monastery murals.

The composition with figures as the center is used for tower murals, with interspersed combination of colors and lines, cleverly forming colorful and elegant paintings. They usually adopt light blue or gray brown as background, use blue, red, yellow, green and gold extensively, and then manipulate backlight and other decorative patterns, and use the attributes of color harmony and contrast to achieve the desired artistic effect. All their exquisite decorative patterns, such as backlight, thrones, bands and curtains, flowers and trees, pavilions and animals, are a very important part of the subject of Palkor Monastery murals. Among them, the backlight is particularly elegant, including flame, horseshoe, niche, linden and dhvaja, rainbow patterns and so on.

Palkor Monastery murals reflect the rich, strong aesthetic characteristics of the ancient Tibetan culture, emphasizing the harmonious and fearful aesthetic content. The highest achievement of religious practice is the highest purport and implication of the



Buddha Eyes on the Top of Palkor Monastery's Jixiangduomen Tower

pursuit and description of their creative intent, that is, the aesthetic pursuit of Palkor Monastery mural art is consistent with the pursuit of the highest ideal of religious practice.

Internationally renowned scholar, Tucci G had an assessment: "Gyantse Palkor Monastery murals are perhaps the most important, monumental Tibetan works of art with distinctive features created by Tibetan artists to our knowledge." French Tibetologist, Dr. Heather Karmay said: "the most important, unprecedented, monumental masterpiece created by Tibetan artists... numerous magnificent paintings in 76 small halls, reflect a mature and brilliant early Buddhist art."



Vaisravana and His Assistants

Palkor Monastery mural. The four Dharmapalas in Buddhism are called "Heavenly kings", commonly known as the "Four Heavenly Guardians", namely, Dhrtarastra, Virudhaka, Virupaksa and Vaisravana. Assistants refer to their guards. The "three-in-one" is a characteristic of Palkor Monastery mural composition, with the main deity in the center and assistants on both sides. The color often uses red, blue and green as the basis, style is more flexible and free without deliberate seeking of details, and lines are naturally smooth and full of fresh vitality and imagination. The heavenly kings in the picture are obviously influenced by Chinese style, and their square faces, slanted eyebrows, Fu Manchu moustache, crowns, and armors reflect the features of Chinese face, clothing and accessories.



Ushnisha Sita Tapatra

Palkor Monastery mural. Ushnisha Sita Tapatra is the 'Goddess of the White Parasol' - protector against supernatural danger. According to the explanation of *Great White Canopy Sutra*, this goddess has great power, covers everything with the power and mercy of Buddha. The color use of the mural reflects the general principles of Palkor Monastery color processing and use, the main deity is white, with red as the background, forming a stark contrast to the ground around the main deity backlight and the color of the main deity, and the processing of body light and head light form a contrast to backlight color, which is a cool color of blue. This use of strong color contrast and description and rendering of warm and cold colors contribute to the outstanding characteristics of use and handling of colors in Palkor Monastery murals.



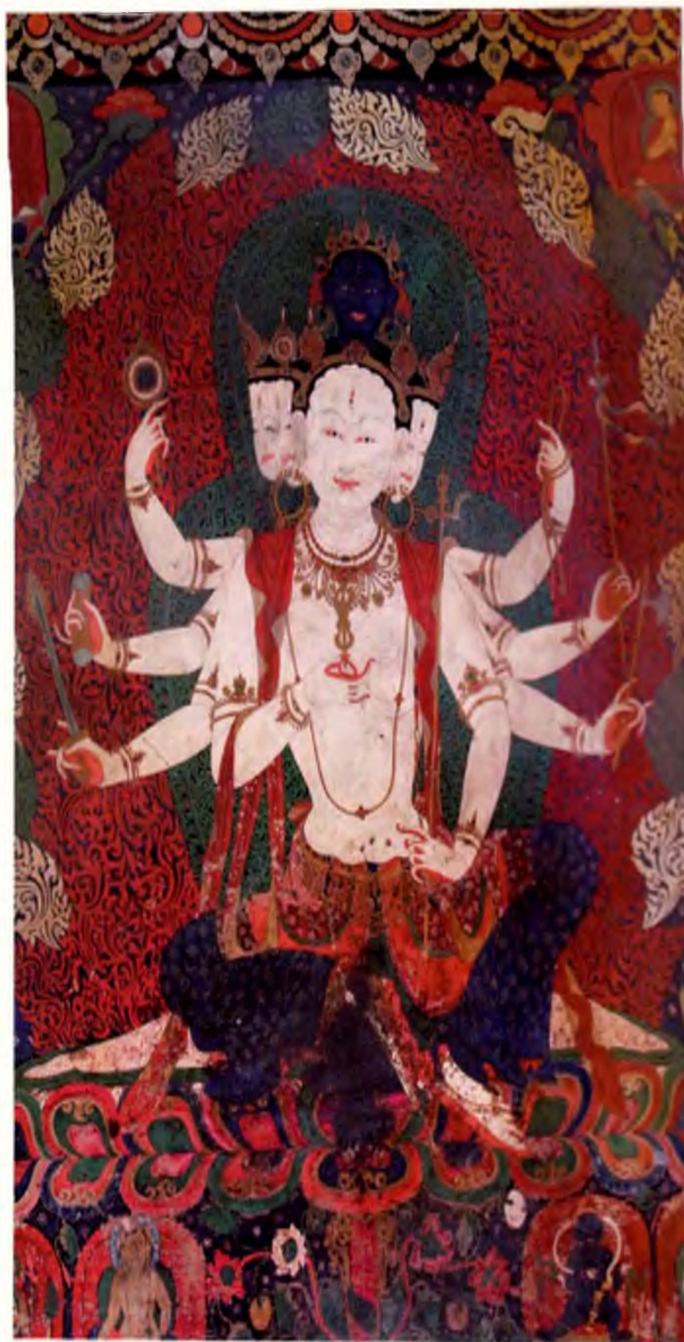
Ekadasa Mukhanam Avalokitesvara

Pelkor Monastery mural. Avalokitesvara, is the Bodhisattva "listening to the voice (of world population)" from the literal interpretation. Avalokitesvara is the first major Bodhisattva in Buddhism. The white Ekadasa mukhanam Avalokitesvara statue in light blue ground and red backlight, although obvious contrast of red, white and blue, the blue in head light, round medallion on the top of backlight, golden medallion clothes, red and green skirt, golden ornaments, etc., make the main deity in the whole picture amiable and kind.

Yamantaka

Palkor Monastery mural. Yamantaka, as one of the Yidams worshiped by Gelug of Esoteric Buddhism, can defeat the evil and protect the good. For Dharmapala with deterrent force, the main color often uses flat color of deep blue, supplemented by white, golden and red, to break the dullness of main color. The painting, characterized by precise lines, vivid performance, and appropriate details, may be called a masterpiece.





Marici with Eight Arms

Palkor Monastery mural. Marici is an invisible guardian god whom can not be seen by many gods even in the heaven. Palkor Monastery murals feature splendid, harmonious colors, beautiful and elegant Bodhisattva, and gorgeous patterns, presenting a strong but beautiful feeling. In the mural, the Bodhisattva has harmonious proportion of body, eight arms and two legs are full of dynamics, graceful, supple and strong. The white elegant body of Bodhisattva and big backlight of red flame pattern and small backlight of green flower pattern complement each other.

Apsara for Offering

Palkor Monastery mural Apsara for Offering is also known as Flying Apsara. Flying Apsara is called "Gandharva" in the Buddhist art, who is a beautiful immortal of aroma good at singing and dancing. The Apsara with quiet and pleasant expression, is slightly leaning his body. The flower decoration around suits him well, red pants are outlined with supple lines to show fabric texture, to increase the comfort beauty of Apsara.



Double-body Arya Tara

Palkor Monastery mural. "Arya Tara" is also translated as "Jetsun Dolma". Dolma means eyes in Sanskrit, resulting from the eye of Arya Avalokiteshvara, and Tara is the merciful Yidam of Arya Avalokiteshvara incarnation, sending difficulties to the other side, therefore it was named so. The "double body" statue is a Buddha statue of embraced men and women, commonly known as "Mandkesvara", but does not mean the human sexual relationship, but a statue of Esoteric Buddhism. The double cultivation is the last two phases in Esoteric Buddhism - that is, incarnation of meditation and wisdom. It is rare among the deities of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. It is not the usual design which consort faces the main deity in the Yab-yum statue, but another body growing from the main deity Arya Tara's waist, just like a double-body.





Dharmapala

Palkor Monastery mural. Most "gods with fierce look" are deities of Esoteric Buddhism or ancient Tibetan Bonpo conquered by Buddhism, generally include Yidam, Vidya-raja, Dharmapalas and other shapes. Dharmapala in the picture emphasizes original, rugged and powerful body, reflecting the strong aesthetic characteristics of the ancient Tibetan culture.



Bodhisattva

Palkor Monastery mural. The related Bodhisattvas with their disciples located around the main deity are of small size but nuanced characterization. The Bodhisattvas, smiling, holding Buddha dust (vyajana) and Vajra, lean the body in an S shape, which is very pleasant looking.



Tara of Source of All Enlightened Activities

Palkor Monastery mural. The Tara uses a manifestation way of dynamic and static combination. Tara is a kind of "god with quiet look" like Bodhisattva, usually with beautiful female face and body, but the mural gives it the characteristics of "god with fierce look", presenting such a unique iconography. The artist interprets the dynamic and static combination harmoniously so that this Tara statue shows wonderful coexistence of beauty and deterrence.



Vajra Quelling Demongs

Palkor Monastery mural. It is the vajra in Tibetan Buddhism who vanquishes the evil. The vajra, Dharmapalas, Vidya-raja and others in Palkor Monastery murals have a common purpose: revealing the heart of compassion and silence through the exaggerated angry and fierce look. Compared with Bodhisattva, it focuses on dynamic, frightening, rough and brave feelings, but conveys the same connotation of Bodhisattva. It features static description in a dynamic way, expression of compassion with anger, and exhibition of affection with hatred.



Green Tara

Palkor Monastery mural. Green Tara, as one of the twenty one Taras, with jade green body, slender and solemn, is the most beautiful, compassionate Bodhisattva in Tibetan Buddhism. The beautiful Green Tara iconography in Tibetan mural, in backlight surrounded by medallion seems quiet and detached. Slight mottling on chest and two arms make the Tara even more solid and moving. The processing of medallion is clever, natural, and beautiful, with highly decorative effect.



Assistant Bodhisattva

Palkor Monastery mural. Assistants beside the main deity in a height of only the arm length of the main deity, play a role in seting off the main body. Creators are also meticulous in characterization of them, each detail of which is the same as that of the main deity.



Gandharva

Palkor Monastery mural. The figure of dancing fairies is clearly influenced by dancers of Indian art. Their bare upper body, lantern-like culottes, and wrists and heels close together present us a art combination of Tibetan and Indian styles.



Apsara for Offering

Palkor Monastery mural. The Apsara for Offering is one of 10 Bodhisattva statues, in a size of 10 square centimeters, with an inscription below each lotus throne.



Arya Tara

Palkor Monastery mural. Rainbow backlight is frequently used for Palkor Monastery murals, mainly in iconography of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. There are usually two types, round and oval. It is characterized by using lines or ribbons of different colors such as red, yellow, blue and green to symbolize the light scattering out of the statue, just like rainbow light.





Tara

Palkor Monastery Jixiangduomen Tower mural. The theme of Esoteric Buddhism is involved in most murals,and the musical instrument on Tara finger is a rare artifact.



Guanyin

Palkor Monastery mural. Bodhisattvas in murals are dominated by the image of female and are all crafted extremely beautiful in face, body, clothing and jewelry. Especially for a merciful Bodhisattva like Guanyin, all the beautiful features of female are bestowed by artists.



Vajra

Palkor Monastery mural. Blue and black are often used for the powerful Dharmapalas with angry look, because these two colors have a calm, solemn and tranquil effect, so as to show the power to deter the evil of Dharmapalahave's eyes.



Amoghasiddhi

Palkor Monastery mural. Amoghasiddhi is associated with accomplishment, and his name means He Whose Accomplishment Is Not In Vain. A statue of Avalokitesvara with Eight Arms is painted on the chest of the Buddha statue, which is a way of expression of Esoteric Buddhism.



Snake Woman

Palkor Monastery mural
Snake woman, also known
as "Lu" or "Lu Woman", is
a kind of half-human, half
snake fairy. Snake woman
has various colors and
shapes. This one, with white
human body, red snake
body, has seven heads like a
flower, and a entangled ta
cleverly forming a beautifu
knot.

Ratnasambhava

Palkor Monastery mural. What is worth noting in the painting is that a small Buddha statue is on the chest of a large Buddha statue, taking a closer look, and a much smaller Buddha statue is on the chest of the small one, forming a three-in-one pattern. Such expression should be the content from the Esoteric Buddhism, or the master and apprentice pedagogy.





Vajrapai

Palkor Monastery mural. Vajrapai is so named because of the vajra in his hand, and Vajrapai represents mighty powers of the Buddhas. In the painting, the design of medallion backlight is clever and natural, and garlands growing from lotus stem are filled with colorful lotus flowers in full bloom, showing a strong sense of decoration.



Amoghasiddhi

Palkor Monastery mural. This Buddha statue is unique in that it, not like other Buddha or Bodhisattva statues in only one body color, has five different colors for the face, upper body, lower body, arms and legs, which can be described as creative.



Sakyamuni

Palkor Monastery mural. Drooping eyebrows, slender and straight nose, rounded cheeks, especially slightly opened eyes and lips, and mysterious smile, have shown a peaceful, serene, and ethereal state of mind, which is difficult to explain in words. Most Buddha statues in Jixiangduomen Tower are of the shape, which is also the pursuit of a Buddhist mental state.



Dharmapala

Palkor Monastery mural. Most Dharmapalas are foreign gods, some from Indian Brahmanism and Hinduism, and some from Tibet Bonpo and folk beliefs. New religious biographies and functions have been re-assigned to these foreign gods after being introduced to Tibetan Buddhism, to maintain Dharma and worldly beings. Five-skull crown, garland, bracelet, necklace, a third eye in the face, hair of flame pattern, tiger or elephant skin skirt... these are the characteristics of Dharmapala in Tibetan murals, and Dharmapala is a "god with fierce look". Its statue gives a fearful feeling, which is derived from the worship function of Tibetan Buddhism.



Bodhisattva

Palkor Monastery mural. It is another red, blue and green-based work, but the Bodhisattva body of blue color is not common. This statue has beautiful face and graceful posture.



POTALA PALACE MURALS

Potala Palace, in Lhasa city, was built during the Songtsan Gambo period in the 7th century. In the 17th century, with the foundation of Ganden Phodrang regime, a theocracy was established in Tibet, and the 5th Dalai Lama moved into the palace. After a massive construction then, the Potala Palace was kept to the scale today with few expansions except the stupa of 13th Dalai Lama built in 1934.

Potala Palace is the most impressive building in Tibet, collecting a lot of murals of diverse subjects and rich content. In addition to biographies of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and eminent monks, they also involve history, medicine, architecture, painting, art, calendar, sports and other fields. The existing murals only include a small number of remains of the Tubo period, the vast majority were painted after 17th century, and the total area covers more than 2,500 square meters. These paintings, reflecting the development trajectory of painting art in different historical periods of Tibet, and the variety of painting styles in Tibet, have a high historical, scientific and cultural value.

The murals found in the east of the Dharmaraja Cave in the Potala Palace are the works of the 7th century AD. The unadorned and powerful brushwork, well-rounded



Potala Palace



figures, and bright and saturated colors, prove that they are no doubt the legacy left by Songtsan Gambo when building Potala Palace.

A large number of murals are painted in the main halls of Potala Palace, which had been finished by several hundred people reputedly for more than a decade. Mural themes include the historical development of Buddhism in Tibet, 5th Dalai Lama's life history, Princess Wencheng's life in Tibet, ancient Tibetan architectural images, a variety of Buddha statues and vajra images.

In the mid-17th century, during the expansion of Potala Palace, the murals in the newly built Red Palace were painted by the painters from Mointang and Kanzi schools of the Tibetan Buddhism. Mointang and Kanzi were the two major painting schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and then integrated into one gradually, known as Menkan school. Mointang school was founded by the disciple of Duozha Jieba, famous artist of Mointang, Shannan, Menla Dunzhujiacuo. Menla Dunzhujiacuo wrote a monograph, "Zaoxiang Liangdu Ruyizhu". The Mointang school founded by him, featuring bright colors, sharp contrast, detailed depiction and magnificent style, is known as the orthodox painting school in Tibet. Kanzi school was founded by Kanzi Qinmu from

Badui, Gonggagang, Tibet. Kanzi was largely affected by Sindhu and Nepal, featuring dark color, full composition, well-rounded figure, and strong decorative style. With the passage of time, in the large system of Menkan, a variety of painting styles appeared, not only maintaining and inherit the tradition of Tibetan art, but also absorbing the artistic styles of India, Nepal and China, with their unique charm of art.

The murals in Potala Palace, which can be called the painting classics of Tibetan Buddhism, enjoy extremely rich techniques of expression. They have life-sized portraits of screen type, and large pictures of top view, featuring grand scenes, varied characters, and full composition. It uses the cavalier perspective, large entire screens with Z-shaped layout, and small portraits with far perspective composition. We can almost say that, Potala Palace murals are a history book and encyclopedia of Tibet in a drawing version.



Virudhaka

Potala Palace mural. The "Four Heavenly Kings" were originally referred to as four Dharmapalas in Buddhism, commonly known as the "Four Heavenly Guardians", consisting of Dhrtarastra, Virudhaka, Virupaksa and Vaisravana. "Virudhaka" means growth of quintessential spiritual power, and protection of dharma, hence it is called Virudhaka. Potala Palace murals are the representative works of Tibetan modern paintings in the golden age, which can be seen from the picture. The heavenly kings feature full composition, rich colors, fully proportional character figures, and completely dynamic picture. Exquisite decoration, proper matching of cold and warm tones, and rich ornamentation changes have played a good role in setting off the main body.

Vaisravana

Potala Palace mural. In modern Tibet, the line performance of mural art was very mature, often composed of several methods, with application based on objects, and the combination of painting with exact delineation and enriched colors and traditional line drawing has fully demonstrated the peak of Tibetan painting.





Vaisravana

Potala Palace mural. "Vaisravana" means He Who Hears Everything, and is famous for his morality. Flame backlight, mushroom-shaped crown, composition method of central figure, detailed depiction and fine composition... from the artistic expression of Potala Palace murals, we can already see the mature style of modern painting in Tibet clearly.



Snake Woman

Potala Palace mural. Rendering of the clouds is one of the characteristics of Mointang school of modern painting in Tibet, and its strong accentuation, makes the snake woman look lithe and graceful.



Virupaksa

Potala Palace mural. "Virupaksa" is able to observe the world, and protect people at any time, hence he is called Virupaksa. The creation of high level murals in Potala Palace was under the direct official organization, by virtue of Tibetan artistic talent advantages, and strengths of Mointang, Qinzi painting schools, therefore, the art success came from a strong foundation.



Virupaksa

Potala Palace mural. Line performance is an outstanding character in Potala Palace paintings, and the flame head light of heavenly kings and the entire clouds behind show the bad fury.



Vajra Mother Earth

Potala Palace mural. Mother Earth is the earth goddess worshiped by Chinese farming nations in the original religion, as the mother of earth and all creatures. The composition of Potala Palace murals is often a mixture of large statues of proper proportion and continuous stories, filled with small paintings of a variety of stories and related portraits around. The paintings are the small portraits around the main deity, small-sized but delicate and elegant, and become an element for effective adjustment.

Vaisravana

Potala Palace mural. Line performance is always an important means of Tibetan painting. With nationalization of painting, the expressive force of lines and internal tension is continually reinforced. From the early "iron line drawing" to hairline drawing, willow leaf drawing, etc. appearing in the Potala Palace murals, line performance became richer and more colorful. Fine brushwork is adopted for the expressive depiction on the clothing in the painting.





Virudhaka

Potala Palace mural. The heavenly king in the painting features great strength, full composition, rich and beautiful colors, vivid lines, nuanced depiction, unique combination of line drawing and mottling, and mutual support of realism and decoration. The peak of Tibetan painting is revealed to the full in the painting.

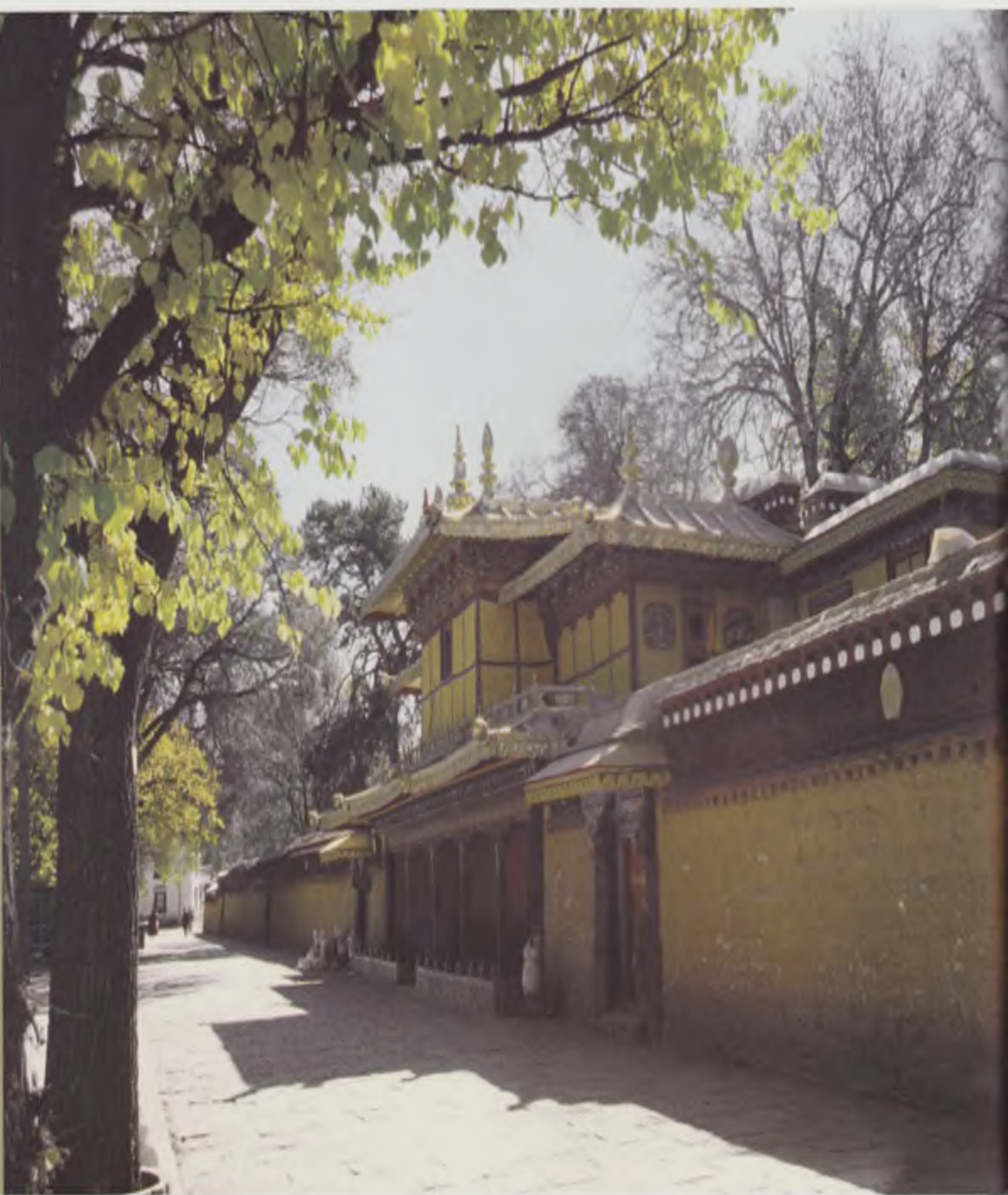




MURALS OF OTHER MONASTERIES

With the development of Buddhism in Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism system formed, and developed into four schools: Nyingma, Kargyu, Sakya and Gelug. The four schools also contained some smaller factions. Completion of a large number of Monasteries led to great mural development. Artists got more creation room, more practice on techniques, so that their styles matured gradually. In the history of Tibet, the period before and after the 14th century AD is important to the art development, and in this period, several major sects flourished and Monasteries were built and expanded aggressively. Kadam's Reting Monastery, Naiting Monastery, Kargyu's Tsurphu Monastery, Drigung Monastery, Caigongtang Monastery, Dalong Monastery, Sakya's Sakya South Monastery, Riwoqe Monastery, Gongkar Qude Monastery, Gelug's Ganden Monastery, Zhaibung Monastery, Sera Monastery, Tashilhungpo Monastery, Qamdo Jampaling Monastery, etc. had been constructed and expanded, with a large number of murals being painted in side, hence a mural genre of unique Tibetan ethnic style was officially formed.

Tibetan mural art, based on the absorption of essence and nutrition of Buddhist art from surrounding areas, has formed its own style over a long period of practice and development. In the existing Tibetan religious paintings, both the styles of Nepal and China are presented by integrating into the Tibetan style. Once formed, this style of art with Tibetan characteristics, in turn, affected the surrounding area. For example, many





works left by Tibetan artists, or subjects and works affected by the Tibetan ritual style were found in the Dunhuang murals. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) and Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), Tibetan Buddhist art affected Gansu, Qinghai and Inner Mongolia, and also expanded to Beijing, Hebei, Hangzhou and other cities. Moreover, murals of Buddhist Monasteries in Ladakh neighboring Tibet are nearly the entire replica of Tibetan murals, which are similar to Tibet on content and style.

Buddhist monastery murals in Tibet, enjoying a long development history, have inherited the outstanding tradition of Tibetan folk art, and also created Buddhist art treasures by absorbing the essence of foreign art. It reflects the brilliant achievements of Tibetan people's cultural exchanges with other nations and foreign countries over a thousand years, which is an integral part of the history of the Chinese nation and human civilization. The Tibetan people have made their unique contribution in the development process of Buddhist mural art.

Norbu Lingka

Norbu Lingka means Treasure Park in Tibetan, located in the western suburbs of Lhasa, Tibet. Built in the 1740s, as a summer palace for the Dalai Lamas, it is the largest artificial garden with best landscape and most historic sites in Tibet. When summer arrives, the Dalai Lamas will transfer from Potala Palace to Norbu Lingka. The oldest murals in Norbu Lingka, which are only 200 years old, collect many famous works of Tibet since the 18th century.





Acalanatha

Wala Monastery mural, Jomdo County. The Wala Monastery is the first monastery in Tibet from Sichuan, and also the largest monastery in the "East Gate of Tibet", Jomdo County. It is dominated by fresh and natural, elegant and bright colors. Except bright red flame backlight in the painting, the lines and colors of other parts, such as landscapes, plants, people's clothing, etc. are much simpler than painting methods of other regions. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Warrior in the Epic "King Gesar"

Wala Monastery mural, Jomdo County. *King Gesar* is the greatest epic masterpiece in Tibetan, and the longest epic in the world. The story is about a god who descended to earth to rescue the people and became a national hero. The oral inheritance among the people contributed to a lot of modern paintings. Picture shows a warrior in the epic *King Gesar*. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Warrior in the Epic "King Gesar"

Wala Monastery mural, Jomdo County. Murals related to the epic *King Gesar* are usually composed of multiple large-scale works, with several representative story scenes, in which war is one of the most important contents. King Gesar descended to earth, to fight against all kinds of demons, and many evil forces in the human world. He defeated all his opponents, and finally restored the happiness and tranquility for Tibetan people. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Engagement

Wala Monastery mural, Jomdo County. Battle scene is a key in the performance of the epic *King Gesar* murals with melee or confrontation, while the two-person fighting is often seen. (Photo by Chen Qingying)







Snake Woman

Wala Monastery mural, Jomdo County. The half-human, half-snake goddess is commonly seen in the sky or water in a number of Tibetan murals, but it is a rare wonderful idea to let her sit on an elephant, but, which was obviously influenced by India and Nepal. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Warrior

Wala Monastery mural, Jomdo County. Compared to the Buddhist painting of Lhasa and other areas, the painting style of eastern Tibetan region has an open and secular character, appearing to be more relaxed and unrestrained. Rendering on the flame pattern backlight around the warrior in the painting is very bold, while the carton style of figure proportion and white horse... has shown the artist's free creation. (Photo by Chen Qingying)







Lamaling Monastery

Supreme and Venerable Dragon King Buddha

Lamaling Monastery mural. Supreme and Venerable Dragon King Buddha is one of the thirty-five Buddhas praised in Buddhist ritual activities. Supreme and Venerable Dragon King Buddha, after achieving Buddhahood, enjoys a life of 440 million years, and provides great service to all beings. The Lamaling Monastery is a Nyingma sect monastery in Linzhi, Tibet. The mural in the cloister on second floor of the main hall is a new modern work. Dozens of paintings separated by square frames cover the entire cloister, and each painting centers a major figure, surrounded by simple landscape or relevant figures in small size. They were painted in a relatively simple way.



Samsara

Lamaling Monastery mural. "Twelve Nidanas" divide the whole life course into twelve continued circular phases, Avidya, Samskara, Vijnana, Namarupa, Sadayatana, Sparsa, Vedana, Trsna, Upadana, Bhava, Jati and Jara-marana. The figure of Samsara is also called figure of karma. This figure explains the Buddhist samsara thought simply to admonish and guide more people to do good deeds. The figure of samsara is gripped in hand and bitten on the edge by huge, ferocious Yama, showing all beings of the Six Realms of Existence are inseparable from Twelve Nidanas. The figure is divided into three to four circles: pigeons, snakes, and pigs are painted in the heart of the inner ring to represent the three poisons of the Buddhism - ignorance, attachment, and aversion, which symbolize the roots of the samsara pain of all beings. The part slightly larger than the center circle is usually half black and half white, which is the illustration about teachings of life, death and bardo. The annular pattern indicates life and death continue forever.







Discourse by Tsongkhapa

Sera Monastery mural. Guru Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) is the founder of Gelug, Tibetan Buddhism in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). He carried out research on the classical theory of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism thoroughly. He absorbed correct theories of predecessors, criticized wrong arguments, and put forward new ideas, so that the classic theory of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism of Nagarjuna and Maitreya covered by clouds of ignorance, misunderstandings and heresy was put right. The center-focus composition of the mural highlights main characters, expands the story by using cavalier perspective as a basis and link, and presents the course of the foundation of the Gelug Sect (Shamanism) by Tsongkhapa and the scene of preaching in a form similar to comics, to set off and show the image of a supreme deity.



Guanyin

Tangboqie Monastery mural. Tangboqie Monastery, located in Tangbuqi Township, Qonggyai County, Shannan, was founded in 1017. The mural was clearly re-drawn based on the original one. The standing Guanyin holds a lotus, but the background or environment has not been drawn yet, leaving only a rough khaki rendering. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Hevajra

Tangboqie Monastery mural. Hevajra is one of the five Yidams of Tibetan Buddhism, with a double body. After the 7th century, Menbris Sama appeared in Tibet. It turned complicated painting colors to simple colors in an innovative way, by using black or red color as the bottom of the whole picture, and painting thin line patterns with golden powder, which reflects the charm of Menbris Sama lines. Its succinct and skilled lines often produce vivid and lively effect. (Photo by Chen Qingying)

Vaisravana

Zhaibung Monastery mural. The Zhaibung Monastery, built in 1416, is one of the three major monasteries in Lhasa, and its largest number of monks had reached 10,000. The monastery with criss-cross lanes, a great number of halls and dorms, is like a town. Unfortunately, some houses have been abandoned, and murals have suffered serious damage. However, from the drawing level, the picture is a piece of work painted at the peak of Tibetan painting in 15th century.







Monastery

Tsurphu Monastery mural. Murals about monasteries appeared after the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Most grand architectural murals were painted at the Potala Palace and Norbu Lingka, and the architectural paintings of the two places usually depicted the construction process, which can be called writing history with paintings. The murals like the painting depicting monastery architectures are few and can only be seen in individual monasteries. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Tsurphu Monastery

Tsurphu Monastery mural. The Tsurphu Monastery, built in 1187, is the place where the important "Living Buddha Reincarnation" system was generated in the history of Tibet. The monastery is located on a grassy hillside, surrounded by water, the well-arranged halls and dorms extend all the way to the mountains... which are depicted in the beautiful mural. (Photo by Chen Qingying)



Cuozong Monastery

Cuozong Monastery, located on an island of Basumtso Lake, Nyingchi, is a Nyingma sect nunnery. Most of the murals with thick tone and beautiful depiction, involve the content of Esoteric Buddhism.



Simhamukha

Cuozong Monastery mural. Simhamukha has an image of lion-head, human-body. According to legend, he is Arya Avalokiteshvara's Dharmapalas.

Dharmapalas

Cuozong Monastery mural. Practice of Shaktism has a certain proportion to the practice of Nyingma Esoteric Buddhism, so the murals, sculptures, etc. in the monastery have many gods of double body and strange image.







Jampaling Monastery

The Jampaling Monastery is in Qamdo Prefecture of the most eastern Tibet. The region's artistic character has a great relationship with its geographical environment, of high mountains, deep water, and towering trees. Its artistic style presents a unique temperament: magnificent but delicate, forceful but beautiful, just like the rich and featured landscape.



Acalanatha

Jampaling Monastery mural. Acalanatha is the destroyer of delusion and the protector of Buddhism. The mural reflects the Jampaling Monastery mural features: bright colors, sharp contrast, fine lines, and landscapes used mostly for background.



Virupaksa and Vaisravana

Jampaling Monastery mural. The differences from the Four Heavenly Kings described in other Monasteries are that the backlight is not a flame pattern, but a wave pattern, and the characters with gentle and naive face, are unlike the mighty, wrathful image of other monasteries.



Virudhaka and Dhrtarastra

Jampaling Monastery mural. The Four Heavenly Kings, usually on both sides of the entrance of a hall, are to frighten demons, and protect all the gods and creatures in the hall.



Apsara for Offering

Jampaling Monastery mural. The backlight is the simple style of the Tibetan mural, but it is rare to see an image of Apsara for Offering with three heads.



Samsara

Jampaling Monastery mural. The Samsara theory, as one of the basic theories of ancient Indian culture, originated from Brahmanism. Buddhism has inherited the Samsara and karma of Brahmanism in the ancient Indian culture, dividing the changes in circulation of birth and death of living beings in the world into the world of desire, world of form and world of formlessness according to the extent of desire and lust, which are collectively referred to as Trailokya (Three Worlds) and also known as abyss of misery. All beings living in the world of desire, from bottom to top, can be divided into "Six Realms of Existence". The Six Realms of Existence can be divided into the Three Good Realms and the Three Bad Realms. The Three Good Realms are for God, Human and Asura; and the Three Bad Realms are for Animal, Preta and Hell. The Jampaling Monastery has been adjacent to the Han areas since ancient times, so this painting was obviously influenced by Chinese painting style, with figures in Han clothes.



Biography of the Buddha (local)

Jampaling Monastery mural. This is a narrative mural, and sizes of the characters in the picture are arranged according to importance. Emphasis on turquoise color, naturalistic processing of landscape, and adoption of close shot... all these are the features of Gachi School in eastern Tibet.









Samye Monastery

Samye Monastery, located at the foot of Mt. Zhama on the north of the Yarlung Zangbo River, Zhanang County, Shannan, is the first monastery of Three Jewels of Buddha, dharma and sangha in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

Biography of the Buddha (local)

Samye Monastery mural. The mural, in the cloister outside the hall of the Samye Monastery, features the main color of turquoise with soft brown, details outlined in thin lines, beautiful and simple overall look, and modest and elegant design.



<148>

Biography of the Buddha (local)

Samye Monastery mural. Depiction on clothing and flowers in the painting is skillful and fine.



Manjusri

Samye Monastery mural. Manjusri, as one of the four Bodhisattvas in Buddhism, and Assistant Bodhisattva to Sakyamuni, represents wisdom. Tibetan, Nepalese and Chinese craftsmen were involved in the construction of the Samye Monastery, so the main building has three regional styles, and, in the murals, we can find the paintings integrating Chinese architectures and gods of Tibetan Buddhism.



Hiking

Samye Monastery mural. Exaggerated depiction on plants and flowers is a feature of Samye Monastery murals. Minor characters or spectacle is often placed in huge plants to form a unique background and composition. The figures in the painting wear clothes of Qing government officials, indicating the painting is likely to be finished in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) .



Amoghasiddhi

Samye Monastery mural. The backlight of the Buddha statue is outlined with golden lines to form a radial, which is solemn and luxurious. Realistic floral background makes the overall design more intimate.



Pilgrim

Samye Monastery mural. This is depiction on a group of pilgrims, and each has a different attitude, dress and look. Superb painting skills are needed to depict so grand scene in such a small area.



Provider

Samye Monastery mural. From the Chinese clothing style of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) of figures, it can be speculated that the author of this mural should come from the Central Plains.



Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery

Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery is an important monastery in Tibet. It was built during the reign of Tibetan king Songtsan Gambo in the 7th century, but destroyed during the reign of Tibetan king Langdarma in the 8th century, and repaired in 1834. The monastery, located at the foot of Mt. Yulajie, Numa Township, Namling County, Xigaze, is a large Bonpo monastery with deep influence in Tibet.



Palden Lhamo

Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery mural. Palden Lhamo is a Bodhisattva of longevity and good fortune. Images of Bonpo deities are rare, and the Palden Lhamo image holding a peacock and Cintamani and riding a lion in the Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery is even more rare.



Mountain God

Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery mural. In Tibetan areas, regardless of believers of the original religion Bonpo, or believers of the Tibetan Buddhism, it is generally considered that most deities live together on the mountain top, so mountains within Tibet have become residence of gods. Like the previous painting, this picture is from the same hall in a unified style. The white-based tone emphasizes the depiction and rendering of clouds to set off the atmosphere of heaven.





Dhrtarastra

Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery mural. Dhrtarastra, one of the four heavenly kings of Buddhism, protects the East. He is said to maintain the state.



Virupaksa

Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery mural. The two murals emphasize the use of red, endowing the pictures with great tension. Artists painted the clouds in detail, but ornamentation in a simple way to replace fine outline.



Dharmapalas

Rela Yongzhonglin Monastery mural. The might and power of Dharmapalas is set off with warm red and dancing flames and clothing, to express Dharmapalas' forces to restrain the evil and develop the good.





Tashilhungpo Monastery

The Tashilhungpo Monastery is the residence of Panchens and also the biggest monastery in Yu-zang. The Tashilhungpo Monastery, at the foot of Mt. Niseri, Xigaze County, Tibet Autonomous Region, founded in 1447, is the religious and political center after 4th Panchen. The murals painted since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and repaired and repainted in the modern times collect the works over hundreds of years.

Virupaksa

Tashilhungpo Monastery mural. This is the statue at the hall entrance. From the style, it should be the work of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The 13th–15th century is an important historical period that Tibetan painting formed its own unique artistic style and matured gradually based on absorption, digestion of outside artistic styles. The statue is a piece of work of high standard in this period.





Vaisravana

Tashilhungpo Monastery mural. The delicate brush strokes of the Vaisravana statue leave people deep impression. All details are depicted meticulously, and almost all the color blocks use mottling or tiny pattern decoration.



图书在版编目（CIP）数据

中国国宝系列-中国西藏壁画：英文/陈丹著；(英) 海·威廉 (H-William) 译.
—北京：五洲传播出版社，2011.11
ISBN 978-7-5085-2210-4

Ⅰ.①中… Ⅱ.①陈… ②海… Ⅲ.①寺庙壁画-西藏-画册 Ⅳ.①J218.6-64

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2011)第212062号

策划编辑：荆孝敏
撰　　稿：陈　丹
摄　　影：陈　丹
翻　　译：H-William (英)
英文审稿：王国振
装祯设计：殷金花
责任编辑：王　莉

中国国宝系列-中国西藏壁画

出版发行：五洲传播出版社
地　　址：中国北京市海淀区北小马厂6号　　邮编：100038
发行电话：010-82001477
网　　址：www.cicc.org.cn
设计承制：北京紫航文化艺术有限公司
印　　刷：北京盛天行健印刷有限公司
开　　本：889×1194　1/20　　印　　张：8.4
版　　次：2012年1月第1版　2012年1月第1次印刷
书　　号：ISBN 978-7-5085-2210-4
定　　价：156.00元

TIBETAN MURALS




ISBN 978-7-5085-2210-4

Price:156.00(RMB)